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FURTHER PROMOTION AND ENCOURAGEMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS, INCLUDING THE QUESTION OF THE PROGRAMME AND METHODS OF WORK OF THE COMMISSION

Written statement submitted by the Movement against Racism and for Friendship among Peoples, a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[11 April 1997]

Situation of women in the Islamic Republic of Iran

1. The third millennium is designated as the era of women's emancipation with hopes that gender discrimination would be minimized and ultimately eradicated. According to the documents of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, eliminating gender inequality is indispensable to advancement in such major issues as peace, development and democracy.

2. Today, religious fundamentalism is the most dangerous threat to the realization of women's equality. It thrives on the oppression of women and advocates and institutes gender discrimination. A prominent example of fundamentalist systems is the theocracy in Iran. Such an interpretation of religion has been rejected by most believers and described as a reactionary view of Islam.

3. Suppression of women and their elimination from social activities is the cornerstone of the Iranian regime. By doing so, the regime exerts control over all the society and suppresses all public protests before they break out in severe forms.

4. Being a woman in Iran has become a continuous agony and torture. A girl child feels this oppression from birth. The laws of the present regime allow the father to marry his daughter to anyone he desires when she turns 9.

5. According to the Special Representative, 1996 marked a year of tighter pressure and intensive clampdown on Iranian women as the general situation of human rights deteriorated. New laws adopted in 1996 legalized persecution and led to further isolation and segregation of women on the charge of improper veiling. Public places were raided in search of mal-veiled women and segregated in various Iranian cities. Movie theatres were segregated in Isfahan, central Iran (AFP, 23 February 1996). Following the segregation of buses, Tehran's mini-buses were also segregated. State officials announced that in this way the number of sins committed because of touching women will be 3.7 million times less per day.

6. Upon official warrant issued by the judiciary, the security forces staged a raid in Chitgar park in Tehran last May, attacking women who rode bicycles or played volleyball and badminton. They warned women that they will be tried and punished on the spot (AFP, 2 May 1996, and Salam newspaper, 12 May 1996). Subsequently, in many cities, including Ahwaz, women were confined to isolated and heavily guarded areas for recreational and sports activities (Tehran radio, 23 February 1996).

7. More restrictions were announced on women's dress (official Iranian press, 20 February 1996). Unlike previous years, when the arrest and punishment of women who did not fully observe the official dress code were intensified in the summertime in 1996, women were brutalized on the streets throughout the year. According to the representative of the Vali-e Faqih, Ali Khamenei, the Guards' Corps Bassij set up 280 bases in Tehran to "combat improper veiling and turn the violators over to the judicial authorities for punishment" (State-run Jomhouri Islami, 5 August 1996).

8. In light of greater restrictions imposed on women and their systematic repression in Iran, widely publicized Government-sponsored schemes, such as the appointment of a woman as mayor of a district in Tehran, are obviously in reaction to the role of women in the leadership of the democratic opposition which has attracted great attention throughout the country and worldwide. Twenty-five thousand people participated in a gathering in London on 20 June 1996, where Mrs. Maryam Rajavi, the Iranian Resistance's President-elect, spoke on the oppression of women and their plight in Iran. As a Muslim woman leading the anti-fundamentalist Resistance of the Iranian people she is the antithesis of Islamic fundamentalism. She, as a Muslim, has declared that the atrocities committed by the fundamentalist rulers of Iran have nothing to do with Islam.

9. MRAP and other human rights organizations have in the past emphasized various cases of maltreatment, humiliation and persecution of Iranian women, including 74 lashes of the whip for non-veiling, a ban on the employment of women is some jobs and educational fields and their travel abroad, and the law which sets the blood money for women and their inheritance rights at half of men's.

10. MRAP urges the Commission on Human Rights and the Special Representative on the situation of human rights in Iran to pay closer attention to the reality of the situation of women and their repression in Iran and not spare any effort to press the Iranian Government to take concrete and practical steps to eliminate gender discrimination and oppression of women in Iran.